

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON) has 4½ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) has 5 minutes remaining.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 15 seconds.

The \$50 million figure comes out of thin air, made of whole cloth; and the gentleman who just spoke wants to have unlimited soft money while this is money under State law, carefully, carefully confined to grassroots activity.

No one should vote for the Emerson amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS), one of the chief cosponsors of this bill.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) for yielding me the time.

This is a very interesting debate. We are on different sides. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY) has a bill that will be coming up that has no limits to soft money on the State level and some limits in soft money on the Federal level; but on the State level he will allow Federal employees to raise that money on the State level.

The gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) has an amendment that he is trying to keep in the bill that was put in by the Senate. The Senate wants this amendment. They believe it is fair because they believe it does not involve any Federal employees, any Federal office-holders, any Federal party people.

□ 2230

It is soft money raised by a State, and a State chooses to do it. Any State that does not allow soft money, there is no soft money. We are allowing States to do what they want to do for their elections, for local and State elections.

Now, I confess to my colleagues that there was an amendment that did this before. The gentleman from Arkansas had an amendment where he wanted the States to raise soft money, and I opposed it because I knew we would eventually send it to the Senate. I wish this amendment were not here, as a purest, but I think it is fair. My concern is that it is a good amendment now, that it could be changed over time, but it is fair now. It works now. And it is absolutely essential if we are to pass this bill that this amendment stay in and that the amendment being offered not be allowed to pass. I cannot emphasize it enough.

We have had some easy votes, maybe my colleagues think. They are going to be really, really close now. After all this, we are going to defeat this bill by accepting an amendment that frankly is pretty amazing given that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY), in a few moments, is going to offer an amendment to allow unlimited soft money at the State level.

So is this a perfect bill? No. It is 85 percent of what I would like it to be.

The gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) and I have had debates about this, because I think this is something that could be turned into something later on. But as it is constructed, as it is used, it is fair. It makes sense. No Federal employees can raise it, it cannot be used by Federal employees, it has limited use, and it cannot be used for any advertising.

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE).

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

We have come full circle. It is 10:30 on a Wednesday night, and I think we have heard just about everything. We have heard that soft money is evil, yet now it is okay. We have heard from the other side that we have to do without it, but now we cannot do without it. We have heard that we have to get rid of it, but now we need it to collateralize loans for hard money and then to pay off hard money loans through an amendment in the middle of the night that nobody seems to want to own up to.

We have heard it all. Let us call this what it is. It is a blatant attempt to buy the last couple of votes needed for this bill, and it keeps getting worse and worse and worse. I wonder at what point people will stand up and say, enough. This is not the bill we started out with. It keeps getting worse.

We have come full circle. Soft money is bad; now it is not only good, it is necessary to promote grassroots activity. Which is it? Please tell us.

I urge support of the Emerson amendment.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, how much time is remaining?

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore (Mr. THORNBERRY). The gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON) has 3½ minutes remaining, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) has 2¾ minutes remaining. The gentlewoman from Missouri has the right to close.

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 15 seconds. To the gentleman from Arizona, if he wants to defame the Members of the Senate, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. FEINGOLD, and all others who voted in favor of this, it was by voice vote, go ahead and do so. Go ahead and do so. The gentleman is making a mistake.

This is to preserve grassroots activity and nothing else.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. EMERSON. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California (Mr. OSE).

Mr. OSE. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman from Missouri for yielding me this time.

Let me just say that I do not serve in the Senate. I serve in the House. My district goes up and down the center part of California. And while I am very

respectful of what the fine Senators in the other body might have to do or say, maybe two of California's Senators might visit my district sometime in the next few months and find out what they are saying, with all due respect to the gentleman. They do not speak for my district, I speak for my district. And if they want to come to my district and visit with my people, I will be happy to have a town hall meeting with them.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume to respond to the gentleman from California that I think his Senators will take up his invitation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MEEHAN), who has worked so hard on this bill and who very much opposes this poison pill amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentleman from Massachusetts is recognized for 2½ minutes.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Michigan for yielding me this time.

It is about 10:35 at night, and the amendments continue. This is an amendment, another attempt to destroy the coalition that we have held together over a period of the last several years. There have been negotiations that have taken place that have been bipartisan and bicameral. We have a historic opportunity here in this House to pass a bill that will fundamentally change the way elections are held in this country. A historic opportunity.

The only way we are not going to have this opportunity is if the opponents of reform are able to pass an amendment that is designed to kill the bill. We have faced a series of those amendments, all taken in last night at about 12 o'clock and all designed to break up the coalition. Sometimes they try to break off Democrats, sometimes they try to break off Republicans, sometimes they have amendments that the Senate will never go along with. Sometimes it is Senate Republicans they are trying to offend. Anything and everything that can be proposed to try to defeat McCain-Feingold/Shays-Meehan has been proposed this evening. This is nothing more than the latest attempt.

But I want to tell my colleagues something. The American people get it. The American people are watching this debate tonight waiting to see who is for real reform, who is trying to break up the coalitions, who wants to pass a bill, and who wants to kill a bill, because every person in this House knows that if we pass a bill designed to go to the conference committee, it is going to die in conference, just where a patient's bill of rights is dying. Just where campaign finance reform in the past has died. That is why we have pre-conferenced this bill with the Senate, to design a bill that is balanced and fair to both political parties.